

Great Salt Lake

Characteristics

The Great Salt Lake is the sixth largest lake in the United States and the fourth largest terminal lake in the world. It is the Western Hemisphere's largest saline lake and the fourth largest worldwide.

At 4,200 feet surface elevation, it is approximately 75 miles long and 30 miles wide with 335 miles of shoreline. It occupies 1,680 square miles or one million acres, and contains 15.4 million acre-feet – or 5 trillion gallons of water.

The watershed presently drains 21,540 square miles in parts of three states. Its average inflow of 2.9 million acre-feet is primarily from the Bear (40%), Weber-Ogden (13%), and Jordan (13%) Rivers - supplemented by internal springs (3%) and direct precipitation (31%). An estimated 95% of all inflow enters regions south and east of Promontory Point. Because of the Union Pacific Railroad's northern causeway, the water remains largely confined to these areas.

Wetlands occupy approximately 400,000 acres or nearly ¾ of all wetlands in Utah. Here, periodic flooding provides the benefits of nutrient dispersal and plant revitalization. Wetlands also provide seasonal floodwater storage and ground water recharge, water purification, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. The marshes, playas, and upland vegetation zone serve as critical buffers to outside disturbances. About half, 200,000 acres of Great Salt Lake wetlands are currently protected to some degree

Its ecosystem consists of numerous islands and remote shorelines offering wildlife sanctuary from predators and human disturbance. Gradations of saline environments and periodic fresh water flushing have, over thousands of years, conceived a dynamic yet stable system. This variation influences the nutrient base and habitats for innumerable plants, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds.

The breadth and abundance of **bird life** have earned the Great Salt Lake its designation as a "Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve." Birds of regional, national, and international significance are drawn to its 15,000 square miles of water environment, remote islands, and shoreline, and 400,000 acres of wetlands. Five million birds representing 257 species rely on the lake for resident feeding and sanctuary, breeding, or migratory stopover.

Mammals in the Great Salt Lake ecosystem include the pronghorn antelope, badger, bison, black-tailed jackrabbit, cottontail rabbit, coyote, deer mouse, kangaroo rat, mink, mule deer, muskrat, porcupine, red fox, striped skunk, voles, and at least 49 other species.

Information courtesy of FRIENDS of the Great Salt Lake